

**ACINIA CORNICULATA (ZETT.) (DIP.: TEPHRITIDAE) AND  
OTHER INSECTS ON A RELICT DOWNLAND SITE IN  
SOUTH-EAST LONDON**

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TEWKESBURY RESERVOIR is a small underground reservoir on Forest Hill, south-east London (grid reference TQ352736). It is just inside vice-county 16, West Kent, and the old Surrey/Kent border abuts the top edge of the locality. The roughly rectangular site is very small, approaching about one hectare in area, but presents an unusual coarse turf downland facing steeply east. It is tightly hemmed in by houses and gardens and the entire area is very much a part of urban and suburban London.

Since the plot is now threatened with development, I was asked by the local Tewkesbury Lodge Residents' Association to take a look at the site and assess its invertebrate interest. Nothing very much was expected, however what started out as a routine listing of a few common species turned into the discovery of something very unusual. A visit was made to the site on 31 July 1995.

The whole area was alive with the flutterings of Meadow Browns *Maniola jurtina* (L.), hundreds of them. In the space of about three hours, eleven species of butterfly were noted, in what was after all a plot the size of a moderate garden. And in what is a very well-surveyed part of the country, the Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus* Rott. was recorded new to the 2km square, tetrad TQ37L (Plant, 1987). The Six-spot Burnet *Zygaena filipendulae* L. was also recorded, new to the 10km square TQ37 (Plant, 1993).

Many of the other insects found were also typical downland species including the Bishop's Mitre shieldbug *Aelia acuminata* (L.), which occurred in some numbers. Thirteen species of hoverfly (Syrphidae) included *Xanthogramma pedissequum* (Harris). Other interesting flies were *Conops ceriaeformis* Meig. (Conopidae) and *Trypetoptera punctulata* (Scop.) (Sciomyzidae). The ant *Formica cunicularia* Latr. was active on the trunk of a large lime tree.

Common knapweed *Centaurea nigra* L. is a prominent feature of the site and sweeping this produced the common tephritid fly *Chaetostomella cylindrica* (Rob.-Desv.) together with a larger pink fly which at first I took to be one of the several *Tephritis* species. Later examination showed it to be a specimen of *Acinia corniculata*, a species accorded Red Data Book status 1 "Endangered" (Shirt, 1987).

There is a scattering of old records for this insect in south-east England, from Hampshire, Herefordshire, Somerset and Surrey. In the recent review of scarce and threatened flies (Falk, 1991) there are only three records since

the selected cut-off date of 1960. These are Wicken Fen (exact date unknown) and Chippenham Fen (1983 and 1986) in Cambridgeshire and Foulden Common (1980s) in Norfolk. Since that publication, two specimens were found on Chailey Common, East Sussex in 1993 (Hodge, 1994). All of these four sites are Local or National Nature Reserves.

The discovery of the insect on what appears to be a scrubby bit of wasteland in south-east London is, at first sight, rather strange. However, examination of old maps shows that the reservoir sits on a range of once open downs which stretch several miles from Deptford to Sydenham. Very little remains open today. The environs have been heavily developed over the last 150 years, and the reservoir site is now completely surrounded by houses and gardens. The only other vaguely natural part of this escarpment remaining is at Honor Oak, about 1 km north, but much of this area has grown into secondary woodland. A small open area does exist, above some allotments, but this too is now threatened with scrub encroachment. No knapweed could be found there during a brief visit on 5 August 1995, nor *Acinia corniculata*.

A return visit to Tewkebury Reservoir in 10 August 1995 quickly turned up another specimen of *Acinia*, suggesting that there is a viable colony on the site. It is tempting to suggest that after construction of the reservoir, a regime of mowing (or grazing) allowed it to revert to its former downland character, absorbing fauna and flora from the surrounding hills and fields. As urban development engulfed the site, it has retained some of its former characteristics and remains a relict downland site. Further visits to the area are intended if the threatened exploitation of the site can be put off.

#### References

- Falk, S., 1991. *A Review of the Scarce and Threatened Flies of Great Britain (Part 1)*. Nature Conservancy Council, Peterborough, p. 100.
- Hodge, P.J., 1994. [*Acinia corniculata* recorded from East Sussex. Exhibit at British Entomological and Natural History Society annual exhibition, 30 October 1993.] *British Journal of Entomology and Natural History* 7: 167, plate 1.
- Plant, C.W., 1987. *The Butterflies of the London Area*. London Natural History Society, London, pp. 91-93, 166.
- , 1993. *Larger Moths of the London Area*. London Natural History Society, London, pp.4-5.
- Shirt, D.B. (Editor), 1987. *British Red Data Books: 2. Insects*. Nature Conservancy Council, Peterborough, p. 31.

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#### A plea for cautious titles of notes and articles

A recent note in this journal (Willmott, K.J., 1995, *Ent. Rec.* 107: 266) recording feeding damage on aspen that looked similar to that made by White Admiral larvae on honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum* was titled "Evidence of White Admiral butterfly (*Limenitis camilla* L.) larvae feeding on Aspen (*Populus tremula*)". The ensuing description of feeding damage on